Education Partners' Forum Consultation Paper

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Executive Summary

In 2002, the Minister of Education launched a three-year plan, *Learning for Life*, in response to the concerns and priorities of stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, school staff, school boards, and many members of the public.

Learning for Life set in motion a different direction for education in Nova Scotia. It established a solid foundation for students to succeed throughout their lives through improved and focused supports in the early years in language arts and mathematics and through opportunities for all students to reach their full potential. Its actions, themes, and initiatives are currently well under way. In 2003, government's *Blueprint for Building a Better Nova Scotia* set out a number of commitments to extend and expand upon *Learning for Life*.

Now it is time to build on that foundation, with a new plan to be finalized by early spring of 2005. The goal of the plan will be for students to leave school with the best preparation possible for their futures so they will be able to participate in Nova Scotia's prosperity and well-being throughout their lives.

To help the department complete the plan, we want to consult on whether the concepts being dicussed will help students improve and will keep the education system moving in the right direction. We also want to know what can be done to make the initiatives that have been identified more effective.

Some of the elements expected to be in the final plan are already familiar, as they carry on the work started with *Learning for Life*. However, other elements are newer for Nova Scotia. At the Education Partners' Forum, those attending will be asked to focus on the newer concepts. This consultation paper has been prepared to assist with this goal.

The initiatives being discussed fall within six key themes. The following table outlines the complete list of initiatives that have been identified, within each of those themes.

Themes	Initiatives for Consultation	Beyond *Learning for Life*
Raising the Bar Setting higher standards for learning and teaching; helping all students reach their greatest potential; and recognizing achievements in and out of school	• Whole School Improvement (Discussion Sheet 1) • Advanced Courses (Discussion Sheet 2) and Student Leadership Programs (Discussion Sheet 3)	• language arts and mathematics literacy • French second language • review of teacher education programming • teacher professional growth planning • support to principals for educational leadership
Closing the Gap Helping every student succeed, recognizing that some students need additional or other types of supports	• Options and Opportunities (Discussion Sheet 4) • Supporting Students with Special Needs (Discussion Sheet 5) • Supporting African Nova Scotian Learners (Discussion Sheet 6) • Racial Equity Policy (Discussion Sheet 7) • Supporting Mi'kmaw Learners (Discussion Sheet 8)	• girls/young women physical activity • assistive technology • enhancing family literacy • literacy support strategy • autism spectrum disorder • tuition support program • more books • technology to support learning • support for ESL • school libraries • special education best practices
Developing Healthy and Active Learners Promoting healthy, active living for students; helping Nova Scotians throughout the province to be healthier and more prosperous	• Physical Activity of Children and Youth (Discussion Sheet 9) • Healthy Foods in Schools (Discussion Sheet 10) • Safe Schools (Discussion Sheet 11)	• new health education and physical education programs • playground equipment • youth health centres • community use of schools
Time to Teach, to Learn Focusing on providing students with more time to learn and teachers with more time to teach	• Voluntary Pre-Primary Program Pilot Project (Discussion Sheet 12) • Time on Task (Discussion Sheet 13)	• class size maximums • class size—accommodations
Measuring and Reporting on Success Monitoring how students and schools are doing and reporting the results to education partners	• Evaluation of Student Learning via Assessments, Standards, Resources (Discussion Sheet 14)	• student information system • graduate follow-up surveys
Strengthening Partnerships Recognizing and strengthening how partners help students and schools to meet educational targets	• School Advisory Councils, Parents, Community, and Business Partnerships (Discussion Sheet 15)	• career development resources • enhanced government partnerships

The intention is to build on the many lessons that have been learned in recent years about what works best. A few of the new elements that are being considered include the following:

- Students need the best possible preparation in schools, with everyone focused equally on continually improving student and school achievement. Should the school improvement and accreditation process that has been piloted in 16 schools for two years be expanded to all schools over time? Those involved with the pilots said this is a powerful tool that has focused the whole school on helping students to succeed and that it is more effective than previous processes.
- We know that healthy living improves individual and community well-being and prosperity. New programs are being considered to help students learn to be healthier throughout their lives starting at an early age. This aligns with the new Office of Health Promotion's mandate to promote healthier living for all Nova Scotians.
- The purpose of high school is to prepare all students for meaningful futures, although the current high school programming does not meet the needs of all students. Broader options and opportunities may ensure all students succeed in high school and are well prepared for a future that is right for them.

The concepts to be discussed are not small, and they will take time to put in place and show results. Much more can be achieved with all partners working together with student success as their first priority. The first step that partners can take is to come together to make sure that the education system is moving in the right direction. To that end, representatives of all partners will provide their input at an Education Partners' Forum, using this consultation paper as their starting point. Nova Scotians may also comment via the Department of Education's website until March 4, 2005.

Introduction

Since 1999, parents, teachers, school board members, students, and taxpayers have had more opportunity than ever before to express their views about education. In the fall of 2002, having listened closely to each concern, the Minister of Education released a new plan, *Learning for Life.*

Learning for Life was a road map that set a different direction for public education by focusing on building a solid foundation for students to succeed throughout their lives. It was based on seven themes:

- **The Early Years**—getting children "ready to learn" by the time they enter school
- **Basics First**—improving reading, writing, grammar, and mathematics skills
- **Success for All Students**—removing barriers to learning
- **Quality Teaching**—ensuring that teachers are prepared, retained, and supported
- **Informed, Involved Parents**—enhancing the role of parents in their children's education
- **Safe Schools, Healthy Students**—safer and healthier environments for learning
- **Financial Accountability**—making changes so the public knows how money is spent

The initiatives to address these themes have been, or are being, implemented. For example, class sizes have been reduced in grade primary and grade 1. Instructional time during the school day has been refocused to emphasize language arts and mathematics; and more information on how students are doing is helping schools and parents focus on improving results.

In 2003, the provincial government introduced its *Blueprint for Building a Better Nova Scotia.* In that document, the government made a number of commitments to expand on *Learning for Life.*

Parents, students, and teachers, as well as many members of the education community and general public agree: the road map outlined in *Learning for Life* has taken education in the right direction. Now it is time to build on this foundation.

When it is finalized, the new plan is intended to broaden and expand upon on the work started with *Learning for Life* by adding more supports for diversity and the later grades, as well as supports for students to learn to live healthy active lives. The goal is that students leave school ready for post-secondary education or work.

The key is to build carefully, thoughtfully, and effectively upon the positive changes that have already been made, so that young Nova Scotians prosper in the future.

Initiatives started with *Learning for Life* will be carried on. These are already well known to education stakeholders and partners—for example, smaller class sizes in the early years and resources for special education.

Other notions are new for Nova Scotia; and it is these that are the focus of the Education Partners' Forum on February 18 and 19, 2005. This consultation paper has been prepared specifically for the Education Partners' Forum.

The Department of Education wants to ensure that what is being considered will indeed keep us moving in the right direction, and for the right reasons. The concepts being discussed are not small, and they will take time to put in place and show results. It was said in *Learning for Life*, and continues to be true: these initiatives will not work overnight, or even in a year or two, but over time, they will make a difference.

That difference can be enhanced and made greater with stakeholders and partners working together and keeping student success as their first priority. To make this difference, partners and stakeholders need to know about what is being considered and have the opportunity to offer informed input on the concepts.

Representatives of all partners in education have been invited to attend the Education Partners' Forum to consider these new proposals and give their input and opinions from their own perspectives. Nova Scotians across the province may also provide input and opinions through the department's website, until March 4, 2005.

Input received from these consultations is expected to be an important component in helping to shape the way forward and in finalizing the new plan by early spring of 2005.

Many valuable lessons have been learned in recent years, and these have pointed to some areas that the Department of Education has identified as requiring attention. Highlights of the initiatives on which consultation is being sought follow on the next pages.

Major Themes—Initiatives for Consultation

1. Raising the Bar

The concepts within this theme would see higher standards developed and put in place for learning and teaching. They would also recognize achievements both in and out of school that contribute to a student's education. The goal is for everyone touched by Nova Scotia's education system to reach his or her greatest potential.

Whole School Improvement

We all want schools to focus on having students achieve their best, and we want all schools to continually strive for improvement.

School improvement is a process that enables schools to make significant gains in their student and school performance. The accreditation aspect recognizes those schools that demonstrate significant improvement over a period of time. As part of *Learning for Life*, 16 schools were invited to take part in a School Improvement Planning and Accreditation pilot project. Each school carried out an internal review of student and school performance. This encompassed all areas of the curriculum and the factors that contribute to school success. The school identified areas needing improvement and developed a plan to address those areas. An external team visited the school to review the school's plan and then either approved the plan or made recommendations for change. The school implemented the plan and committed to providing yearly updates on its activities and progress.

Three years after implementation, an external team will return to assess the school's progress toward its goals. If the school makes significant progress in achieving those goals it will be given accreditation.

Everyone involved said the School Improvement and Accreditation process is one of the most powerful tools they have used for improving both school and student performance. The notion is to build on that success and introduce the School Improvement and Accreditation program to every school over time.

Advanced Courses

Nova Scotia already offers advanced mathematics and science courses as part of the Public School Program. In addition, International Baccalaureate (IB) grade 11 and 12 courses are recognized as advanced courses whether taken as part of a complete IB program or as individual courses. Currently, the IB program is offered in two high schools in the province. Several other schools in the province offer provincial or locally developed advanced courses for students who wish to write Advanced Placement Examinations. Advanced courses often act as bridges to university, and some are recognized for advanced standing or credit by certain universities.

The concept is to increase the number and variety of advanced courses that are offered and expand online access to them. Also, that every school board could have at least one high school offering IB to its students; that students will have increased access to Public School Program advanced courses, both in class and online; and that students will have increased opportunities and support to write Advanced Placement Examinations.

Student Leadership Programs

Youth who learn leadership skills carry them throughout their lives. This is a long-term benefit to Nova Scotia. The public school system already supports the development and recognition of academic achievement through the Governor General's Medal and of students' leadership skills and community involvement through the Medal of the Lieutenant Governor and the Queen Elizabeth II Medal. The Office of Health Promotion (OHP) is developing more leadership skill development programs.

The goal is to support the additional OHP programs, to supplement existing ones, and to give students more opportunities to participate in individual and school leadership programs. Credits can be given for activities outside of classrooms that contribute to a well-rounded education, such as participation in 4H programs, independent study, or volunteer work in the community. Finally, that public schools support new programs that are being designed to recognize individual and school commitment. These would include the Premier's Award of Excellence, the Minister's Award of Merit, and the MLA's Award of Recognition.

2. Closing the Gap

The ideas within this theme recognize that some students are not succeeding in the existing public school system and need additional or different supports. The goal of this theme is to help every student reach success. This requires ongoing collaboration with, and the contribution of, many partners.

Options and Opportunities (O_2)

Everyone agrees that it is important to find ways to keep students engaged with their education so they will stay in school until graduation. Several programs have been piloted with this goal in mind. They have all included academic supports, family supports, community-based education programs, as well as self-esteem and interpersonal relations improvements. In some cases, they have included changes to the school structure itself.

Some students are not succeeding academically in regular high schools. They need new ways to move into meaningful work or post-secondary education; increased support for community-based education initiatives (co-operative education and short-term placements in community workplaces, as well as expanded youth apprenticeship opportunities); and information to help them prepare for successful futures.

The goal is to use the lessons learned from the pilot programs to increase the number of students that stay in school until graduation. A package of programming could be developed to ensure that, over time, options are developed to meet all students' needs. Ongoing collaboration with education and community partners would be a key part of this program's success. For example, the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) has agreed to guarantee seats for successful students in appropriate programs.

Supporting Students with Special Needs

The *Special Education Implementation Review Committee Report* of 2001 made 34 recommendations, many of which were put in place under *Learning for Life*. Those not yet implemented include improved communications with parents of students with special needs and enabling school boards to buy more approved special education resources.

- During the next five years, it is proposed to implement these recommendations. The implementation could include expanded communications with parents of students with special needs to provide more learning opportunities, including conferences, handbooks, fact sheets, and other materials; helping teachers work with students with special needs; and ensuring that school boards receive funding to buy approved special education resources.

Best Practices in Student Services

In the past two years, school boards have received funding for pilot projects to study different ways to deal with difficult student services issues, including behaviour issues.

Thanks to these pilots, many best practices have been identified.

- The establishment of a permanent fund for school boards, tentatively called the Innovation Challenge Fund, is being considered so all school locations can benefit from these practices, or expand their existing services.

Reading Recovery™

Reading Recovery is an intensive program specially designed to help those children in the lowest 20 per cent of grade 1 readers. Over the years, it has proven to support students' reading abilities in subsequent years of school. This encourages them to keep reading and, therefore, learning. *Learning for Life* made a commitment to provide this program to all grade 1 classrooms. This goal will be achieved in 2005–2006 and will be maintained in future years. This program links into the idea of a language arts assessments in grade 3, in that it ensures that students have good reading skills.

- Now that the program is implemented, a move to improve the overall quality is being considered. For example, because this work is intense, Reading Recovery teachers need to be regularly reassigned to fresh challenges. A new systemic approach to ongoing training could sustain an adequate supply of teachers with these important skills. Also, Reading Recovery may be extended to students in French Immersion classes in addition to regular English classrooms as soon as this training becomes available.

Supporting African Nova Scotian Learners

The 1994 *Black Learners Advisory Committee Report on Education: Redressing Inequity—Empowering Black Learners* (BLAC Report) provided many recommendations for ways to create an education system that would be more equitable and accessible to African Nova Scotian learners. Since 1994, several recommendations have been implemented.

Priority areas that remain to be addressed include

- developing school programming that augments what is currently available, to better reflect the needs of a diverse student population across the curriculum
- creating youth leadership and development programs for African Nova Scotian children and youth that would help them learn the skills and strategies they need to make greater achievements in school and in society
- encouraging African Nova Scotian youth to pursue the preparations they need for good lives for themselves and their communities through access to scholarships and awards for post-secondary education, as well as access to a Transition Year Program at Nova Scotia Community College that would open doors to skills and trades training
- ongoing research about African Canadian learners to enable the African Nova Scotian community to more effectively contribute to the renewal of the education system

Over the next three years, it is proposed to act on the operational aspects of the balance of the recommendations as outlined above. Input is sought on prioritization of the plan.

Racial Equity Policy

The Racial Equity Policy was developed as a response to various issues brought into particular focus by the *Black Learners Advisory Committee (BLAC) Report on* Education and the *Report of the Task Force on Mi'kmaq Education.* Policy development was completed in 2002 in consultation with the Department of Education's Divisions of African Canadian Services, Mi'kmaq Services, and Student Services (Multicultural Education). With respect to implementation, it is being put into effect at elementary grades in the 2004–05 fiscal year.

The idea is to extend this policy to the junior high and high school levels. The object would be to have schools bring the policy to life through awareness training and conferences to they can share their experiences, evaluate the changes, and plan for even greater improvement.

Supporting Mi'kmaw Learners

The results of several reports on aboriginal peoples (1996), education (2002), and strengthening relations between Canada and Aboriginal Peoples (2004) have consistently said that we must improve education outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth. The *Alberta Commission on Learning Report* contained numerous recommendations on this issue. All reports agree that aboriginal educators and leaders must be central to these discussions, across Canada. In Nova Scotia, the focus should be on supporting Mi'kmaw learners, in consultation with Mi'kmaw partners in education. The experiences and needs of other First Nations learners will be included as well.

The idea is to examine the educational experiences and needs of First Nations learners in the Nova Scotia public school system, who are predominantly Mi'kmaq. The initiative being considered is studying best practices at demonstration sites with the idea to extend these practices and support them with professional development programs.

Some pilot sites for home-school support workers could be established and evaluated. The results of this initiative would be shared so that next steps may be considered.

It is widely recognized that if knowledge of the language of a community or people is eroded, the culture from which it sprang is also eroded. Therefore, education resources could be developed to support the Mi'kmaw language curriculum for junior high school grades.

3. Developing Healthy and Active Learners

The initiatives for this theme recognize that schools have a role to play in promoting healthy, active living for students. With the co-operation of school partners, and by making many individual changes over time, students can become better, more engaged learners at school and healthier Nova Scotians for life.

Safe Schools

The provincial *School Code of Conduct* was introduced to school boards in 2002. All schools now have their own school codes of conduct.

New code of conduct guidelines are being implemented in schools to ensure that schools are caring, safe, and positive environments that support the best possible learning conditions. This would assist teachers, students, and parents with programming to prevent and resolve conflicts, to address behaviour and discipline issues, and to encourage positive, effective conduct for and by all students, as well as others in the school.

Training in Positive Effective Behavioural Supports is scheduled to start in March 2005 and extend over three years to all schools.

Physical Activity of Children and Youth

Just as a child engaged in learning becomes a learner for life, a healthy, active child becomes a healthy, active adult. This benefits all Nova Scotians and is a primary reason why everyone is concerned about the state of children's health. Nova Scotian children need to become healthy, physically active adults, and this starts with improving their lifestyles while at school.

An Active Healthy Living Consultant could be placed in each school board working with a provincial co-ordinator to develop and implement a full range of programs. Additional physical education teachers could be added over time.

The government's new Office of Health Promotion (OHP) will promote healthier living for all Nova Scotians, and one goal is to achieve a 10-point improvement in rates of physical activity for all physically inactive children by 2010. One concern is the level of physical activity in girls, which tends to decline as they get older, unlike in boys.

- The idea is to support the OHP goal by expanding current after-school physical activity programs and by working with partners to develop new ones; by developing programs that encourage more female students to continue being physically active in school; and by refurbishing playground equipment so that students have places where they can be physically active.

Community Use of Schools

Under the Department of Education's new Community Use of Schools Policy, we would see the health of communities improve, because communities would be encouraged to make more use of school facilities for activities.

- Assistance could be made available so that communities with P3 schools would have equal ease of access to schools.

Healthy Foods in Schools

Children need to make healthy food choices if they are to learn, grow, and develop and become healthy adults. Schools have an important role to play in supporting children and in helping them learn to make healthy food choices. The lesson starts by ensuring that all foods available in schools are healthy and nutritious. It includes moving away from the sale of unhealthy foods, such as chocolate bars, for school fund-raising. Access to healthy food in schools is an issue, as is food safety in schools.

- Working with families, communities, and partners at the Office of Health Promotion and the Department of Health, a new Healthy Foods in Schools policy will help schools, students, and parents meet this challenge. Consideration may be given to provide additional support for equipment (such as refrigerators); and regular inspections through the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries could ensure ongoing food safety. With the Office of Economic Development, the Department of Education could help school boards make best use of available funds by developing contracts with Nova Scotia companies to provide students with locally produced healthy foods at the best price available. Another idea is to generate alternatives for fund-raising to minimize any negative impact on school revenues.

Breakfast Programs

Students who start their day with a nutritious breakfast are more attentive and better able to learn. There are many successful school-based breakfast programs already in place that can provide useful experiences to guide an expanded breakfast program plan.

The goal is to ensure that every student starts the day with a healthy breakfast, starting initially in elementary grades, in collaboration with the Office of Health Promotion, the Department of Health, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and other education partners. Provincial standards would be developed so all breakfast programs would deliver a consistent quality of food. Nova Scotia's school boards would be able to draw upon a broad range of expertise, resources, and materials to help them meet these standards.

4. Providing Time to Teach and Time to Learn

One of the successful themes of *Learning for Life* was a renewed emphasis on the basics of education. The new plan must recognize that today's youth need to know much more than ever before if they are to participate fully in a global society. This requires preparation so that students enter school ready to learn. It also requires taking a fresh look at the way the existing school day and school year are structured to ensure that students have more time to learn, and teachers have more time to teach.

Time on Task

Minimum amounts of time per day have already been set for mathematics, language arts, French, and physical education. This has, however, placed pressure on school schedules and, in some cases, has resulted in less time for instruction in other important areas. Minimum daily hours of instruction are set out in regulations, as is the daily maximum of six hours for most grades. School boards already limit non-instructional interruptions during the school day, and they have been asked to ensure that December and June are used most productively for students' learning. However, students still need more time to learn, and teachers say they still need more time to teach.

Consideration could be given to a new plan to alleviate the pressures on school schedules, by finding ways to create more time for instruction. This will be done with broad input from all education stakeholders who are focused on students' needs and on maximizing student achievement.

Voluntary Pre-Primary

Students who have opportunities to adapt to social settings and get accustomed to structured programs enter grade primary better prepared to learn. In its *2003 Blueprint*, the provincial government committed to pilot a new Voluntary Pre-Primary Program to give students this advantage. There are a number of issues and concerns to be addressed, including nutrition, user-friendly pre-registration, and in some areas, transportation. Roles and responsibilities during the pilot need to be defined and evaluation criteria identified so that the pilot can be monitored and then analysed at its conclusion. This will support decisions on whether to make the program more widely available.

It is proposed that 20 sites be in place by 2005–2006. The curriculum could be based on early childhood development principles, be activity based, and emphasize socialization skills. Pilot sites are anticipated to be in areas where access to day care is limited and where school space is available.

5. Measuring and Reporting on Success

The concepts within this theme would see more information become available to support sound educational decisions and a greater focus on continuous improvement. The goal is to ensure that students get the individual support and attention they need, so they have opportunities to succeed in school, and beyond.

Evaluating Student Learning

Key Stage Assessments, Starting Early

Reliable information throughout a student's school years is critical to preparing them for success. The Atlantic Canada curriculum provides curriculum outcomes at the key stages of grades 3, 6, and 9. A language arts literacy assessment is already being done in grade 6, and the results are used to deliver supports for students not meeting the outcomes in reading and writing. Supports continue through junior high until grade 9, when they are reassessed. National and international assessments also provide valuable information about how Nova Scotia's school system and its students are achieving in relation to other jurisdictions. Parents and students also want to know "how good is good enough" so they can recognize successful achievement.

The initiative to be discussed is to conduct assessments in both language arts and mathematics at the key stages of grades 3, 6, and 9, and also to establish learning benchmarks in these areas at the same key stages. Participation in national and international assessments is proposed to continue. This enables parents and students to know throughout public school how the students are doing. It allows teachers to plan changes in their instruction to resolve student learning gaps both in the early years and as students enter the next levels of their schooling in junior high and high school. It also helps school boards and the Department of Education to see how Nova Scotia is doing and to plan for improvement.

Setting Classroom Evaluation Standards

Teachers regularly assess their students—to learn about the effectiveness of their teaching and to see how well their students are learning. Given the concept of key-stage assessments for all students, it is important that teachers use assessment techniques that provide the most reliable information for making effective decisions. Elementary teachers already have a classroom assessment resource to help them determine their students' reading levels.

Implementing international standards for classroom evaluation is being considered. This would begin in junior high school and extend to other grades over time for greater consistency in evaluating student achievement. As well, introducing a classroom assessment resource for mathematics to parallel the reading assessment resource already in place could be useful. This will help elementary teachers develop strategies to help individual students meet acceptable achievement levels. Mathematics study guides are proposed for students in senior high school.

Annual Reporting

The annual *Minister's Report to Parents: Student Assessment Results for Nova Scotia* has been published since 2001. It sets out provincial and school board performance in the areas of mathematics, language arts, and science on provincial, national, and international assessments conducted in the previous school year.

The idea is to expand the report to include more detail to support improvement planning, and to enable school boards to report on their own progress in support of province-wide educational priorities.

6. Strengthening Partnerships for Students' Benefit

School Advisory Councils

School advisory councils (SACs) were established by the *Education Act* in 1996. They were meant to provide school boards with strong local voices and community input on all educational decisions. SACs include community members, parents, and sometimes students, as well as the principal and some school staff. A review of the role of SACs in education has been completed. The department's recently released response recommends a more meaningful role for SACs to the benefit of students and the school system in their region.

The concept is to help SACs take on a stronger role in school improvement planning and in enhancing school-parent communications, as well as to move toward providing stronger, more informed local input to school board decisions. To help SACs take on this stronger role, additional support could include an orientation manual, annual regional conferences, and more regional co-ordination.

Informed, Involved Parents

Well-informed and appropriately involved parents improve a school's focus on education because the parents' priority is to help their children improve and succeed. Existing parent resources include pamphlets, fact sheets and guidelines, a parent website, and the annual *Minister's Report to Parents*. A provincial standard report card is becoming available in more school boards so that parents have similar information on how their children are doing.

Several initiatives to help all parents could further develop their knowledge of how the system works and how they can best support their child's learning. For example, developing more pamphlets and brochures, conducting regional conferences for parents of students with special needs and African Nova Scotian parents, and including information on how school boards are meeting educational priorities in the *Minister's Report to Parents*. As well, more parent-friendly information on the website and report cards to include information about individual program plans, where these are in place, could be developed.

Education Partners

Stronger relationships between schools and other educational partners can provide better supports to students who are in transition into or within public school, and especially from high school to post-high school.

These partnerships could be strengthened by creating more comprehensive career development assistance and by working more closely with Nova Scotia Community College and universities. These partnerships would, in turn, give students the groundwork for better supports for career development and transitions throughout life.

Community and Business Partners

All of Nova Scotia benefits when students and schools succeed and when students lead healthy, active lifestyles. Community and business partnerships, including those involving labour and government agencies, can help schools develop high-quality educational programs that better meet the needs of all students in public schools. Many of those partners can also help improve physical activity levels and healthy lifestyles.

Existing partnerships can be enhanced, and new ones developed, at the community level. This will help ensure that all students' needs are met and that all students have strong supports, not only at school and at home, but in their larger communities. Options for consideration may include co-operative education, community placements, or apprenticeship training, as well as opportunities to volunteer or to take part in recreation activities.

Next Steps

This consultation paper has been prepared specifically to support a major Education Partners' Forum for representatives of all education stakeholders, on February 18 and 19, 2005. At this forum, participants will have the opportunity to give input and feedback on items outlined in this paper and in the attached one-page discussion sheets on key topics.

Members of the public are also being given the opportunity to review the consultation paper, via the Department of Education's website, and to provide their comments and suggestions.

Following the Education Partners' Forum, and receipt of comments and suggestions from other Nova Scotians, the new plan will be drafted, taking into account the information that will have been received. This input is an important part of shaping and finalizing, by the early spring of 2005, the new plan to guide our collective way forward.

Government will then have the information it needs to make decisions, including key funding allocation decisions. It is reasonable to expect the new plan, when finalized, to be a long-term plan.

Changes will take some time to put in place and to show results. Regardless of whether changes are large or small, their impact can be made greater with all education partners working together, moving in the same direction, with student success as their first priority.

Appendix: Discussion Sheets

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET

Whole School Improvement

Theme: *Raising the Bar*

Background

We all want schools to focus on having students achieve their best, and we want all schools to continually strive for improvement.

School improvement is a process that enables schools to make significant gains in their student and school performance. The accreditation aspect recognizes those schools that demonstrate significant improvement over a period of time. As part of *Learning for Life*, 16 schools were invited to take part in a school improvement planning and accreditation pilot. Each school carried out an internal review of student and school performance. This encompassed all areas of the curriculum and the factors that contribute to school success. The school identified areas needing improvement and developed a plan to address those areas. An external team visited the school to review the school's plan, and then either approved the plan or made recommendations for change. The school implemented the plan and committed to providing yearly updates on its activities and progress.

Three years after implementation an external team will return to the school to assess the school's progress toward its goals. If the school makes significant progress in achieving its goals it will be given accreditation.

The Concept For Discussion

Everyone involved said the school improvement and accreditation process is one of the most powerful tools they have used for improving both school and student performance. The notion is to build on that success and introduce the school improvement and accreditation program to every school over time.

Additional Information

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET February 18–19, 2005

Advanced Courses

Theme: *Raising the Bar*

Background

Nova Scotia already offers advanced mathematics and science courses as part of the Public School Program. In addition, International Baccalaureate (IB) grade 11 and 12 courses are recognized as advanced courses whether taken as part of a complete IB program or as individual courses. Currently the IB program is offered in two high schools in the province. Several other schools in the province offer provincial or locally developed advanced courses for students who wish to write Advanced Placement examinations. Advanced courses often act as bridges to university, and some are recognized for advanced standing or credit by certain universities.

The Concept For Discussion

The concept is to increase the number and variety of advanced courses that are offered and expand online access to them. Also, that every school board could have at least one high school offering IB to its students; that students will have increased access to Public School Program advanced courses both in class and online; and that students will have increased opportunities and support to write Advanced Placement Examinations.

Additional Information

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET February 18–19, 2005

Student Leadership Programs

Theme: *Raising the Bar*

Background

Youth who learn leadership skills carry them throughout their life. This is a long-term benefit to Nova Scotia. The public school system already supports the development and recognition of academic achievement through the Governor General's Medal, and students' leadership skills and community involvement through the Medal of the Lieutenant Governor and the Queen Elizabeth II Medal. The Office of Health Promotion (OHP) is developing more leadership-skill development programs.

The Concept The Concept For Discussion

The goal is to support the additional OHP programs, to supplement existing ones, and to give students more opportunities to participate in individual and school leadership programs. Credits can be given for activities outside of classrooms that contribute to a well-rounded education, such as participation in 4H programs, independent study, or volunteer work in the community. Finally, that public schools support new programs that are being designed to recognize individual and school commitment. These would include the Premier's Award of Excellence, the Minister's Award of Merit, and the MLA's Award of Recognition.

Additional Information

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET February 18–19, 2005

Options and Opportunities

Theme: *Closing the Gap*

Background

Everyone agrees that it is important to find ways to keep students engaged with their education so they will stay in school until graduation. Several programs have been piloted with this goal in mind. They have all included academic supports, family supports, community-based education programs, as well as self-esteem and interpersonal-relations improvements. In some cases they have included changes to the school structure itself.

Some students are not succeeding academically in regular high school. They need new ways to move into meaningful work or post-secondary education; increased support for community-based education initiatives (co-operative education and short-term placements in community workplaces, as well as expanded youth apprenticeship opportunities); and information to help them prepare for successful futures.

The Concept For Discussion

The goal is to use the lessons learned from the pilot programs to increase the number of students that stay in school until graduation. A package of programming could be developed to ensure that over time, options are developed to ensure all students' needs are met. Ongoing collaboration with education and community partners would be a key part of this program's success. For example, the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) has agreed to guarantee seats for successful students in appropriate programs.

Additional Information

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET February 18–19, 2005

Supporting Students with Special Needs

Theme: *Closing the Gap*

Background

More Supports

The *Special Education Implementation Review Committee Report* of 2001 made 34 recommendations, many of which were put in place under *Learning for Life*. Those not yet implemented include improved communications with parents of students with special needs, and enabling school boards to buy more approved special education resources.

The Concept For Discussion:

During the next five years, it is proposed to implement these recommendations. The implementation could include expanded communications with parents of students with special needs to provide more learning opportunities including conferences, handbooks, fact sheets, and other materials; helping teachers work with students with special needs; and ensuring school boards receive funding to buy approved special education resources.

Best Practices in Student Services

In the past two years, school boards have received funding for pilot projects to study different ways to deal with difficult student services issues, including behaviour issues. Thanks to these pilots, many best practices have been identified.

The Concept For Discussion:

The establishment of a permanent fund for school boards, tentatively called the Innovation Challenge Fund, is being considered so all school locations can benefit from these practices, or expand their existing services.

Reading Recovery™

This is an intensive program specially designed to help those children in the lowest 20 per cent of grade 1 readers. Over the years, it has proven to support students' reading abilities in subsequent years of school. This encourages them to keep reading, and therefore learning. *Learning for Life* made a commitment to provide this program to all grade 1 classrooms. This goal will be achieved in 2005–06 and will be maintained in future years. This program links into the idea of a language arts assessments in grade 3 in that it ensures students have good reading skills.

The Concept For Discussion:

Now that the program is implemented, a move to improve the overall quality is being considered. For example, because this work is intense, Reading Recovery teachers need to be regularly reassigned to fresh challenges. A new systemic approach to ongoing training could sustain an adequate supply of teachers with these important skills. Also, Reading Recovery may be extended to students in French Immersion classes in addition to regular English classrooms as soon as this training becomes available.

Additional Information

Through *Learning for Life* funding, pilot projects were initiated to enhance effective programming and services for students with special needs. Targeted funding increased the number of resource teachers, speech-language pathologists and school psychologists. Guides and information fact sheets have increased communication with members of the education community.

The majority of schools have access to Reading Recovery. However, because this program is intense, Reading Recovery guidelines recommend that teachers return to classroom teaching after 4–5 years of providing this program. In their classrooms, these highly trained teachers enhance literacy learning in the classroom and contribute to a strong literacy focus in the school as a whole.

There is a French first language Reading Recovery program—*Interventions preventive en lecture-ecriture* —and an Observation Survey—*Le sondage d'observation en lecture-ecriture*—available to Francophone countries across the world and in use in all Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) schools. The Nova Scotia Department of Education played a lead role in this program. For the past two years it has (in conjunction with the Manitoba Department of Education and the Canadian Institute of Reading Recovery) piloted research looking into the use of the French first language program in the French Immersion program.

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET February 18–19, 2005

Supporting African Nova Scotian Learners

Theme: *Closing the Gap*

Background

The 1994 *Black Learners Advisory Committee Report on Education: Redressing Inequity—Empowering Black Learners* (BLAC Report) provided many recommendations for ways to create an education system that would be more equitable and accessible to African Nova Scotian learners. Since 1994, several recommendations have been implemented.

Priority areas that remain to be addressed include

- developing school programming that augments what is currently available to better reflect the needs of a diverse student population across the curriculum
- creating youth leadership and development programs for African Nova Scotian children and youth that would help them learn the skills and strategies they need to make greater achievements in school and in society
- encouraging African Nova Scotian youth to pursue the preparations they need for good lives for themselves and their communities through access to scholarships and awards for post-secondary education, as well as access to a Transition Year Program at Nova Scotia Community College that would open doors to skills and trades training
- ongoing research about African Canadian learners to enable the African Nova Scotian community to more effectively contribute to the renewal of the education system

The Concept For Discussion

Over the next three years, it is proposed to act on the operational aspects of the balance of the recommendations as outlined above. Input is sought on prioritization of the plan.

Additional Information

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET

Racial Equity Policy

Theme: *Closing the Gap*

Background

The *Racial Equity Policy* was developed as a response to various issues brought into particular focus by the *Black Learners Advisory Committee (BLAC) Report on Education* and the *Report of the Task Force on Mi'kmaq Education*. Policy development was completed in 2002 in consultation with the Department of Education's Divisions of African Canadian Services, Mi'kmaq Services and Student Services (Multicultural Education). With respect to implementation, it is being put into effect at elementary grades in the 2004–05 fiscal year.

The Concept For Discussion

The idea is to extend this policy to the junior high and high school levels. The objective is to have schools bring the policy to life through awareness training and conferences so they can share their experiences, evaluate the changes, and plan for even greater improvement.

Additional Information

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET

Supporting Mi'kmaw Learners

Theme: *Closing the Gap*

Background

The results of several reports on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), education (2002) and strengthening relations between Canada and Aboriginal Peoples (2004) have consistently said that we must improve education outcomes for Aboriginal children and youth. The *Alberta Commission on Learning Report* contained numerous recommendations on this issue. All reports agree that aboriginal educators and leaders must be central to these discussions, across Canada. In Nova Scotia, the focus should be on supporting Mi'kmaw learners, in consultation with Mi'kmaw partners in education. The experiences and needs of other First Nations learners will be included as well.

The Concepts For Discussion

The idea is to examine the educational experiences and needs of First Nation learners in the Nova Scotia public school system, who are predominantly Mi'kmaq. The idea being considered is studying best practices at demonstration sites, with the idea to extend these practices and support them with professional development programs.

Some pilot sites for home-school support workers could be established and evaluated. The results of this initiative would be shared so next steps may be considered.

It is widely recognized that if knowledge of the language of a community or people is eroded, the culture from which it sprang is also eroded. Therefore, education resources could be developed to support the Mi'kmaw language curriculum for junior high school grades.

Additional Information

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET

Physical Activity of Children and Youth

Theme: *Developing Healthy and Active Learners*

Background

Just as a child engaged in learning becomes a learner for life, a healthy, active child becomes a healthy, active adult. This benefits all Nova Scotians, and is a primary reason why everyone is concerned about the state of children's health. Nova Scotian children need to become healthy, physically active adults, and this starts with improving their lifestyles while at school.

The government's new Office of Health Promotion (OHP) will promote healthier living for all Nova Scotians, and one goal is to achieve a ten-point improvement in rates of physical activity for all physically inactive children by 2010. One concern is the level of physical activity in girls, which tends to decline as they get older, unlike boys.

Under the Department of Education's new Community Use of Schools Policy, we would see the health of their communities improve because communities would be encouraged to make more use of school facilities for activities.

The Concepts For Discussion

An Active Healthy Living Consultant could be placed in each school board working with a provincial co-ordinator to develop and implement a full range of programs. Additional qualified physical education teachers could be added over time.

The idea is to support the OHP goal by expanding current after-school physical activity programs and by working with partners to develop new ones; by developing programs that encourage more female students to continue being physically active in school; and by refurbishing playground equipment so that students have places to be physically active.

Assistance could be made available so those communities with P3 schools would have equal ease of access to schools.

Additional Information

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET February 18–19, 2005

Healthy Foods in Schools

Theme: *Developing Healthy and Active Learners*

Background

Children need to make healthy food choices if they are to learn, grow and develop and become healthy adults. Schools have an important role to play in supporting children and helping them to learn to make healthy food choices. The lesson starts by ensuring that all foods available in schools are healthy and nutritious. It includes moving away from the sale of unhealthy foods, such as chocolate bars, for fund-raising. Access to healthy food in schools is an issue, as is food safety in schools.

The Concept For Discussion

Working with families and communities, and with partners at the Office of Health Promotion and the Department of Health, a new *Healthy Foods in Schools* policy will help schools, students, and parents meet this challenge. Consideration may be given to provide additional support for proper equipment (such as refrigerators), and regular inspections via the Department of Agriculture & Fisheries could ensure ongoing food safety. With the Office of Economic Development, the Department of Education could help school boards make best use of available funds by developing contracts with
Nova Scotia companies to provide students with locally produced, healthy foods at the best price available. Another idea is to generate alternatives for fund-raising to minimize any negative impact on school revenues.

Breakfast Programs

Students who start their day with a nutritious breakfast are more attentive and better able to learn. There are many successful school based breakfast programs already in place which can provide useful experiences to guide an expanded breakfast program plan.

The Concept For Discussion:

The goal is to ensure every student starts the day with a healthy breakfast, starting initially in elementary grades, in collaboration with the Office of Health Promotion, the Departments of Health and Agriculture and Fisheries, and other education partners. Provincial standards would be developed so all breakfast programs would deliver a consistent quality of food. Nova Scotia's school boards would be able to draw upon a broad range of expertise, resources, and materials to help them meet these standards.

Additional Information

Development has started on a policy about healthy foods in schools. It is expected to cover topics such as student access to food, quality of food, and nutrition education, which are found in school food and nutrition policies both nationally and internationally. Other topics could be included as well. Student access issues include time to eat, pricing, facilities, student choice and hungry children. Fund-raising and food safety are expected to be included within the quality component, and it is anticipated that nutrition education will include curriculum development.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET February 18–19, 2005

Safe Schools

Theme: *Developing Healthy and Active Learners*

Background

The provincial *School Code of Conduct* was introduced to school boards in 2002. All schools now have their own school codes of conduct.

New code of conduct guidelines are being implemented in schools, to ensure that schools are caring, safe, and positive environments that support the best possible learning conditions. This would assist teachers, students, and parents with programming to prevent and resolve conflicts, to address behaviour and discipline issues, and to encourage positive, effective conduct for and by all students, as well as others in the school.

The Concept For Discussion

Training in *Positive Effective Behavioural Supports* is scheduled to start in March 2005 and extend over three years to all schools.

Additional Information

The Protection of Students policy is another recent Department of Education document which provides additional measures to ensure the safety of students (e.g., criminal background checks for staff and volunteers, protocols for child abuse reporting requirements).

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As an concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET February 18-19, 2005

Voluntary Pre-Primary Program

Theme: *Providing Time to Teach and Time to Learn*

Background

Students who have opportunities to adapt to social settings and get accustomed to structured programs enter grade primary better prepared to learn. In its *2003 Blueprint*, the provincial government committed to pilot a new Voluntary Pre-Primary Program to give students this advantage. There are a number of issues and concerns to be addressed, including nutrition, user-friendly pre-registration and, in some areas, transportation. Roles and responsibilities during the pilot need to be defined, and evaluation criteria identified so the pilot can be monitored, and analysed at its conclusion. This will support decisions on whether to make the program more widely available.

The Concept For Discussion

It is proposed that 20 sites be in place by 2005–06. The curriculum could be based on early childhood development principles, be activity-based, and emphasize socialization skills. Pilot sites are anticipated to be in areas where access to day care is limited and where school space is available.

Additional Information

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

Time on Task

Theme: *Providing Time to Teach and Time to Learn*

Background

Minimum amounts of time per day have already been set for mathematics, language arts, French, and physical education. This has, however, placed pressure on school schedules and, in some cases, has resulted in less time for instruction in other important areas. Minimum daily hours of instruction are set out in regulations, as is the daily maximum of six hours for most grades. School boards already limit non-instructional interruptions during the school day, and they have been asked to ensure that December and June are used most productively for students' learning. However, students still need more time to learn, and teachers say they still need more time to teach.

The Concept For Discussion

Consideration could be given to a new plan to alleviate the pressures on school schedules, by finding ways to create more time for instruction. This will be done with broad input from all education stakeholders who are focused on students' needs, and maximizing student achievement.

Additional Information

The school year is 195 days. The 195 includes an estimated 28 days in which students do not receive instruction. These days include 11 days for examinations under the Provincial School Calendar; 8 provided within the *Teachers' Provincial Agreement* for administration, marking and professional development; the annual NSTU Conference Day; one day for parent-teacher interviews; weather (estimated at 5 per year) and the first and last days of school. This leaves a net of 167 days per year for student instruction.

Regulations pursuant to the *Education Act* provide for not less than five hours of teaching per day for grade 3 and up (not less than 4 for grades Primary, 1, and 2). In the *Regulations*, it is stated that a school board may direct that not more than six hours of teaching shall be provided on each school day in any classroom. At 5 hours per day and 167 days, students would receive 835 hours of teaching; at 6 hours per day x 167 days, 1002 hours.

More information, including a range of options to consider that could create more time for instruction, will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET

Evaluating Student Learning and Annual Reporting

Theme: *Measuring and Reporting on Success*

Background

Key Stage Assessments, Starting Early

Reliable information throughout a student's school years is critical to preparing them for success. The Atlantic Canada Curriculum provides curriculum outcomes at the key stages of grades 3, 6, and 9. A language arts literacy assessment is already being done in grade 6, and the results are used to deliver supports for students who are not meeting the outcomes in reading and writing. Supports continue through junior high until grade 9, when students are reassessed. National and international assessments also provide valuable information about how Nova Scotia's school system and its students are achieving in relation to other jurisdictions. Parents and students also want to know "how good is good enough."

The Concept For Discussion:

The initiative to be discussed is to conduct assessments in both language arts and mathematics at the key stages of grades 3, 6, and 9, and also to establish learning benchmarks in these areas at the same key stages. Participation in national and international assessments are proposed to continue. This enables parents and students to know throughout public school how students are doing. It allows teachers to plan changes in their instruction to resolve student learning gaps both in the early years, and as students enter the next levels of their schooling in junior high and high school. It also helps school boards and the Department of Education to see how Nova Scotia is doing, and to plan for improvement.

Setting Classroom Evaluation Standards

Teachers regularly assess their students, to learn about the effectiveness of their teaching and to see how well their students are learning. Given the concept of key-stage assessments for all students, it is important that teachers use assessment techniques that provide the most reliable information for making effective decisions. Elementary teachers already have a classroom assessment resource to determine their students' reading levels.

The Concept For Discussion:

Implementing international standards for classroom evaluation is being considered. This would begin in junior high school and extend to other grades over time for greater consistency in evaluating student achievement. As well, introducing a classroom assessment resource for mathematics to parallel the reading assessment resource already in place could be useful. This will help elementary teachers develop strategies to help individual students meet acceptable achievement levels. Mathematics study guides are proposed for students in senior high school.

Annual Reporting

The annual *Minister's Report to Parents: Student Assessment Results for Nova Scotia* has been published since 2001. It sets out provincial and school board performance in the areas of mathematics, language arts, and science on provincial, national, and international assessments conducted in the previous school year.

The Concept For Discussion:

The idea is to expand the report to include more detail to support improvement planning, and to enable school boards to report on their own progress in support of province-wide educational priorities.

Additional Information

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As described, will these concepts have an impact on student achievement? Help move education in the right direction?
2. From your own perspective what else might be done?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?

EDUCATION PARTNERS' FORUM: DISCUSSION SHEET

Education, Community, and Business Partners

Theme: *Strengthening Partnerships for Students' Benefit*

Background

School Advisory Councils

School Advisory Councils (SACs) were established by the *Education Act* in 1996. They were meant to provide school boards with strong local voices and community input on all educational decisions. SACs include community members, parents, and sometimes students, as well as the principal and some school staff. A review of the role of SACs in education has been completed. The department's recently-released response recommends a more meaningful role for SACs to the benefit of students and the school system in their region.

The Concept For Discussion:

The concept is to help SACs take on a stronger role in school improvement planning and in enhancing school-parent communications, as well as to move toward providing stronger, more informed local input to school board decisions. To help SACs take on this stronger role, additional support could include an orientation manual, annual regional conferences, and more regional co-ordination.

Informed, Involved Parents

Well-informed and appropriately involved parents improve a school's focus on education because the parents' priority is to help their child improve. Existing parent resources include pamphlets, fact sheets and guidelines, a parent website, and the annual *Minister's Report to Parents*. A provincial standard report card is becoming available in more school boards so parents have similar information on how their children are doing.

The Concept For Discussion:

Several initiatives to help all parents could further develop their knowledge of how the system works and how they can best support their child's learning. For example, developing more pamphlets and brochures, conducting regional conferences for parents of students with special needs and African Nova Scotian parents, and including information on how school boards are meeting educational priorities in the *Minister's Report to Parents*. As well, provide more parent-friendly information on the website, and report cards that include information about Individual Program Plans, where these are in place, could be developed.

Education Partners

Stronger relationships between schools and other educational partners can provide better supports to students who are in transition into or within public school, and especially from high school to post-high school.

The Concept For Discussion:

These partnerships could be strengthened by creating more comprehensive career development assistance, and by working more closely with Nova Scotia Community College and universities. These partnerships would, in turn, give students the groundwork for better supports for career development and transitions throughout life.

Community and Business Partners

All of Nova Scotia benefits when students and schools succeed, and when students lead healthy, active lifestyles. Community and business partnerships, including those involving labour and government agencies, can all help schools develop high-quality educational programs that better meet the needs of all students in public schools. Many of those partners can also help improve physical activity levels and healthy lifestyles.

The Concept For Discussion:

Existing partnerships can be enhanced, and new ones developed, at the community level. This will help ensure that all students' needs are met, and that all students have strong supports not only at school and at home, but in their larger communities. Options for consideration may include co-operative education, community placements, or apprenticeship training, as well as opportunities to volunteer or to take part in recreation activities.

Additional Information

More information will be made available during an information session to be presented on Saturday, February 19, 2005.

Discussion Questions

1. As a concept, do we have this right? Does this concept lead to student improvement, and does it help move education in the right direction?
2. If not, then from your own perspective, why not?
3. What modifications might be made that could improve this concept? Why?